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Henry Pack likes 'no-till' technique

Henry Pack has been using no-till farming techniques in his dairy operation for 12 years.

In addition to saving labor and time, the no-till method also conserves topsoil and requires less expensive equipment.

The technique is simple. After a crop is harvested, the field is left alone, not plowed under, as in the normal cultivation method.

"The best crop rotation is corn, followed by small grain, followed by grass," notes Pack, who has been farming full time since his retirement from teaching in 1974.

In a normal year, Pack plants about 25 acres of corn to be used as silage and feed grain for his dairy herd, which includes 50 milk cows and about 70 young calves and heifers.

"Corn is the foundation of this whole operation," Pack says in reference to his dairy. "You have to either buy it or grow it."

And at approximately $150 per acre planting cost, you can be sure that Pack is not going to take chances on an unsound agricultural method. "About the only problem you might have with no-till is insect damage," Pack says. "But in a dry year, that doesn't become much of a problem."

Pack also uses the no-till method on his soybeans, which are used to supplement the corn feed.

In addition to the savings in time, labor and equipment expenses, the no-till crop technique also opens up more land for use in planting crops. "You can plant on land with more slope using no-till," Pack notes. And the land which is used will, in general, be productive for a longer period of time. Because the remnants of root systems and other structure are left at the surface of the soil, the no-till field retains moisture better and is less likely to lose topsoil through wind and water erosion.

While the no-till farming method is not new, it is only in recent years that it has gained wide acceptance as a legitimate farming technique.

"No-till is just really getting started now," Pack notes. "I think it will be a widespread practice in the future."

HENRY PACK EXAMINES THE DEVICE he uses for his no-till planting technique. Pack notes that the no-till method not only saves labor costs and equipment costs, but preserves the land's topsoil and frees up more land for planting. With no-till cropping, a farmer can plant crops on land with a greater slope than when using normal cultivation practices.

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